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ABSTRACT

First-year outcomes of a project called Involving Minority Parents of At-risk Children (IMPAC), a parent-school partnership implemented at the Carrington Middle School in Durham, North Carolina, are described in this paper. Begun during the 1991-92 school year, the program serves a predominantly African American population. Processes and activities to achieve program goals, i.e., to improve student attendance, academic performance, and parent involvement, are described. Program components include parent workshops, a learning resource center, an incentive program to reduce student absenteeism, and a communications network. Overall, during the 1991-92, school year parent participation was overwhelmingly better than it had been during the 1990-91 school year. In pre- and post-surveys, most parents said that they benefitted from the workshops. Student scores on the California Achievement Test (CAT) improved by 13 percent, although findings are inconclusive in determining how many students passed core subjects. The tutorial program was judged to be successful, and a monthly newspaper was published by students and parents. Finally, the program reduced absenteeism by 20 percent, falling short of its 25 percent target. Appendices contain a tutorial referral form, parent and student surveys, and a parent workshop activity evaluation form. (LMI)

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INVOLVING MINORITY PARENTS OF AT RISK CHILDREN

IMPAC

Carrington Middle School
227 Milton Road
Durham, NC 27712

A PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP
Durham County Schools
Student Support Services
1991 – 92

EA 024 767

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INVOLVING MINORITY PARENTS OF AT RISK CHILDREN

A PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

CARRINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
227 Milton Road
Durham, NC 27712

DURHAM COUNTY SCHOOLS
Student Support Services
1991 - 1992

Developed and Coordinated

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

During the 1991-92 school year, Carrington Middle School piloted the IMPAC Program with funding from the State Department of Public Instruction's Student Services Division to establish a parent/school partnership with the intent of helping students who need additional motivation for attendance and reinforcement with academics. Carrington focused also on bridging the gap between home and school and involving parents with their children. Through sharing our program goals and implementation procedure, it is our hope that this manual will be a valuable resource to help establish a parent/school partnership in your local area.

INTRODUCTION

Impac (Involving Minority Parents of At-risk Children) is a program designed to create a partnership between the school, parents and community. Carrington Middle School located in Durham, North Carolina has been the leading force in bringing together a group of parents, students and community leaders. The idea of a partnership is to encourage everyone to take ownership of the program and work together to provide solutions for people, especially for children to grow to the fullness of their talents. The Impac Program is a result informal conferences with parents from the Oxford Manor Public Housing Community in response to improving student attendance and academic success at Carrington Middle School. The program focus is on improved communications, skill building, and performance of students and parents The following are goals of the program: To improve attendance of students, to improve academic performance of students, and to increase/improve parent involvement.

NEEDS OF THE PROGRAM

Carrington Middle School serves one of the largest public housing projects in Durham County with a populatıcn of 649 residents. Ninety-nine percent of this population is African American. Of the 649 residents, 390 are public school age. According to public housing records, 75% of their parents dropped out of school while in grades eight or nine. Records also show that the average yearly household income is $6,326.

Eighty youngsters in grades, 6, 7, and 8 from this housing project attend Carrington Middle School. These youngsters and their families will be the target population of our school/parent partnership. Based on the socio-economic and educational demographics of this targeted community, these 80 youngsters have experienced high absenteeism and poor academic performance. The previous year statistics on absenteeism from Carrington's Student Information Management System report indicate that the highest number of days out of school for youngsters in this target group was 51, with a yearly average of 27. The California Achievement Test results indicate that over 60% of these youngsters have consistently scored below the 40th percentile.

When education is not seen as a priority by parents, high absenteeism and poor academic performance on the part of their children are the harvest we consistently reap. Current reports in Durham County have shown that much of this apathetic attitude toward school is the direct result of a historical cycle that has been passed down from older generations to younger generations living in this public housing project. This cycle exists mainly because of grandparents, parents and their children's less than positive experiences as students and their own educational limitations. According to James Comer, a Yale child psychiatrist, "When you ask low-income children to do well in school, you're asking them to aspire to positions in life that are different than their own parents, and you've created a conflict between home and school for the child. So you've got to involve parents in a program at the school in ways so they will support the program and not view it as antagonistic."

Carrington Middle School developed and implemented the IMPAC Program during the 1991-92 school year. We recognized that the key to improve school attendance and academic progress of our minority student population residing in the Oxford Manor Community was the establishment of a parent/school partnership.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The parent involvement component is to provide a series of parent/school meetings within the community and at the school. The focus of these meetings or workshops is to get parents to feel comfortable and knowledgeable about their child's school and education. The workshop topics were chosen according to expressed needs of community parents. When parent meetings were held at the school, a school bus was provided for transportation and arrangements were made for child care, if needed.

Component two is a learning resource center to provide tutorial services in the community. Even though after-school tutoring is available to students at Carrington Middle School, the lack of transportation prevents most of these students from taking advantage of this service; therefore, we set up a learning resource center within the Oxford Manor Community that included a library and turtoring space. We used tutors from North Carolina Central University in Durham, N. C.

Component three is an incentive program to reduce the absenteeism rate among the targeted student population. With the help of local businesses, incentives are provided each quarterly report period for perfect school attendance, honor roll, improved school attendance and improved grades. These rewards are presented to students in the community on occasions when peers and/or parents are gathered.

The fourth component is a communications network to publish a monthly newspaper with school, student, and community news. This is a joint project using parents and students as reporters, writers, and editors. At least one parent is needed to help coordinate the publication and distribution of the newsletters.

Realizing that change does not happen over night, we decided to make a three year plan for the IMPAC Program.

STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Involvement in Community Activities

Individual Home Visitations

Involvement of Parents in Planning Programs

Support of Community Leaders

Collaboration of School and Community Resources

GOAL I: To Increase/Improve Parent Involvement

One of our objectives was to establish parent/school meetings in the community and at the school. Our first step to accomplish this objective was to gain the confidence and support of community leaders by meeting with the housing managers and the president of the Tenant Council, a very influential person in the community. We set up a meeting to get their support and cooperation, which was very essential to the success of the program. At this meeting, we included the following in our presentation:

1. Reasons for the need of the IMPAC Program
2. How our goals will be accomplished
3. The need for a place to provide tutorial services
4. Similar programs offered within the community

At this initial meeting, we found out that another program, Parenting Initiative for Education (PIE) was operating in several public housing communities. We met with the coordinator of PIE to find out how we could join forces within the Oxford Manor Community. It was decided we would develop our program with the support and help from PIE.

We planned a second meeting with several representatives from the targeted parent population and community leaders. Again, we wanted to explain the IMPAC Program goals, get input and suggestions from another group. We believe that people need to have input in a program, if they are to fully take ownership of the program. The residents of the community know what the concerns are and how things are accomplished in their community; therefore, their input and suggestions are vital to the success

or failure of the program.

PARENT WORKSHOPS/MEETINGS

Based upon the needs of the targeted parent population, we decided that the following topics would be most beneficial for parents:

1. Besides Teachers, Who Can Help My Child at School?
2. Time Management.
3. Homework: Developing Good Study Skills.
4. Effectively Communicating with My Child's Teachers.
5. Inexpensive and Nutritious Snacks.
6. Free Summer Opportunities for Children.
7. Living in a Drug-infested Community.

PLANNING PARENT MEETINGS

•Finding Resource People

After deciding on workshop topics, we found resource people to conduct each session. Most of our resource people were from the school system. Other resource people came from the Agricultural Extension Agency, Durham Substance Abuse Services, Parenting Initiative for Education, graduate students and retired teachers.

•Time of Meetings

We surveyed our parent population to determine a convenient time to have parent meetings. The time selected was 11:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. To accommodate many parents, we suggested having the meetings at different times of the day to see when there is the best attendance of parents.

•Refreshments

We served refreshments at each meeting. We held many of our meetings between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. We called these meetings luncheon meetings. We served meat and cheese trays which can be purchased at local grocery store deli's. We also served chips and a beverage. Other refreshments were very simple snack foods and beverages

such as donuts, coffee and/or tea. We asked community businesses and organizations to donate many of our refreshments.

•Parent Incentives

In an effort to increase better parent participation, we tried strategies that would motivate parents to attend meetings. In the Oxford Manor community we found that many parents like to play Bingo; therefore, we played Bingo after many of our meetings. We bought or solicited from local businesses inexpensive and useful prizes for the Bingo winners (soap, dish detergent, tooth paste, toilet tissue, paper towels).

•Publicizing Parent Meetings

In an effort to publicize parent meetings in the community, first we tried sending letters and flyers home by the students. We gave students these letters as they left school to board the bus. This was not a very effective method. We found out, after talking with several parents, that the students never gave the letters to their parents.

Our second try at publicity was for the coordinators to go door-to-door, along with some of the students to talk to parents about attending the meetings. We also left a flyer with the parent after our conversation. This method worked best, but because of the time it took to do this, we could not do it on a regular basis.

Our third and most successful try at publicity was the recruitment of a dependable and influential parent from the Oxford Manor community to serve as our parent meeting contact person. This parent made sure other parents were told about meetings. She personally contacted parents and distributed flyers to remind them of the meetings and times. This method worked best for all of us.

•Transportation to School Meetings

One of the concerns expressed by parents at our first meeting was a lack of transportation to school. Most of the parents do not have cars and there is no public transportation to the school, which is five miles from Oxford Manor Community. We met with school officials to see if a school

bus or school activity bus could be used to transport parents for important school meetings and activities such as parent conferences, parent-teacher association meetings, and open house.

WHY - A TUTORIAL PROGRAM?

GOAL II: To Improve Academic Performance of Students

TUTORIAL PROGRAM

To accomplish the goal of improving academic performance, we set up a community-based tutorial program. The tutorial program was set up within the community because we wanted to build a child's close relationship with a tutor in a non-threatening environment. The child does not have to feel that she/he is intimidated or on display by participating in a community tutorial program. The tutorial program will not only help a child do better in school, but also foster a child's positive self image.

Location: We met with the housing manager and the tenant council to find the best suitable location within the community. In the Oxford Manor community, there is a recreation center with many rooms that are not in use all of the time. We were allowed to use a room that was large enough to accommodate thirty (30) student desks, bookshelves, and a desk that could be used for the tutors. The room was set up as a classroom and resource center. Other furniture needed, we obtained from a school that had been closed and the Durham County School's warehouse. Books were donated by the school media center and individual school personnel donated encyclopedias. We bought many other books and instructional materials and supplies from funds received through a grant. A group of community parents and students worked together to paint the room, bookshelves and other furniture. Potted plants were donated to add to the decorum of the room. Some of the very good artistic students drew pictures that were hung on the walls. The Durham County Housing Authority had all of the floors in the recreation center stripped and waxed. The students, parents, housing manager, and other residents displayed a great deal of pride in this accomplishment.

•Recruitment of Tutors

In the recruitment of tutors, it is of the utmost importance to select people who will be dependable and genuinely interested in helping students with their school work. We contacted local colleges and technical schools. Colleges with education majors are a good source for finding people who are interested in teaching children. We interviewed each applicant recommended in an effort to determine their dependability and commitment for the duration of the tutorial program. We were able to hire graduate students who were very much dedicated to teaching minority youngsters. We were also able to hire a graduate student to work with parents who were attending local technical schools and colleges.

•Referral of Students

We distributed flyers in the community announcing the tutorial program. We placed posters and referral forms in strategic spots within the community. We notified the principals and teachers of the different schools about the program. Referral forms were made available to the local schools. We also had students refer themselves.

•Operating Procedures

We developed a schedule with the number of days a week the tutoring center would operate and how long each session would last. We met with the tutors to set up rules for themselves and the children while in the center. Tutoring sessions should be informal but not a time for play and relaxation. A system of communicating with school teachers was developed so that the student's time spent in the program was most beneficial to his/her learning needs. The tutors should be closely supervised if they have never tutored before. The coordinators of the IMPAC Program were at the tutoring center each day. Luckily, all of the tutors we had selected were highly skilled and had had experience as tutors. After about two weeks into the tutorial program, we recognized that the tutors we had selected needed little or no supervision. We had staff meetings once a month to discuss plans and concerns of the IMPAC Program.

•Student Incentives

Most of the students who attended the tutoring sessions were not highly motivated to attend on a regular basis, so we developed an incentive plan. We held monthly pizza parties, gave school tee shirts and hand-held calculators, and treated students to a meal at a local fast food restaurant as incentives for regular attendance.

•Open House

To show our program to the community and also to publicize our program, we had an open house soon after the tutoring program began to operate. We invited people within the local community, businesses and organizations, school personnel and parents. Parents are more likely to come if their children are involved in the tutoring program and especially if their children are involved in the open house ceremony. We held our open house in February and presented a short Black History Month presentation. All of the children participated in this presentation. Refreshments were donated by McDonald's and a local church organization in the community.

WHAT WORKS FOR IMPROVED ATTENDANCE?

GOAL III: To Improve School Attendance

INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Each report card period or each quarter rewards were given to students with perfect school attendance. Rewards were also given to students who did not have perfect attendance but who had made significant improvement in their school attendance. We combined all of our incentive programs, and presented rewards once a month in the tutoring center for:

1. Perfect School Attendance.
2. Perfect Tutorial Participation.
3. Honor Roll.
4. Improved School Attendance.
5. Improved Grades.

At the end of the school year, we had an annual awards program. We gave participation certificates to all students who attended the tutorial program. As an added bonus, we gave each student a positive self image poster for them to hang on the wall in their rooms at home.

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

As another method of motivation, we started a community newspaper featuring the accomplishments of the children in the community. We recruited a parent to help coordinate this project. We assigned different students to be reporters each month. We drew upon the talents of the students in determining what the content of the newspaper would be. The student reporters interviewed adults who lived within the community about their jobs and career aspirations. Student interviews consisted of sports and other school activities. We featured honor roll and perfect attendance lists for each school report card period. We also featured art work of students and other interest story activities. Community events were highlighted and reported in the newspaper.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The needs of residents living within a public housing community are many. Education is intertwined in their many needs. To address the educational needs of the children and parents in the community, a collaborative approach must be used. We chose, very carefully, representatives from local businesses, civic organizations, churches and the schools to serve on an advisory board to lend support and act as consultants for growth of the IMPAC Program.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The primary expected outcome of the IMPAC Program is to establish cohesive school/parent partnership that will increase parents' involvement in their child's education. By increasing a parent's involvement in school, you increase the likelihood of the child remaining in school with improved attendance and academic performance. The following criteria was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the IMPAC Program:

1. Comparison between last years and this year's school attendance records.
2. Comparison between last year and this year's core subject grades.
3. Pre- and Post-parent questionnaire
4. Pre- and Post-student questionnaire
5. Parent evaluations of workshops
6. Evaluation summaries from collaborating agencies.

SUMMARY REPORT/EVALUATION

IMPAC (Involving Minority Parents of At-Risk Children)
Parent Involvement Grant Program Report

Carrington Middle School's parent involvement program, Involving Minority Parents of At-risk Children (IMPAC), reports the following results for the first year of a three year program.

The IMPAC Program served seventy-seven (77) instead of eighty (80) students and their parents living within the Oxford Manor Public Housing community. Three (3) students moved from the area at the beginning of the IMPAC Program. The parents were offered community based workshops on the following topics:

1. Getting To Know School Supportive Services Personnel
2. Helping Your Child With Time Management and Study Skills
3. Nutritious Appetizing Snacks
4. Making the Most Of A Parent Teacher Conference
5. Effective Communication Skill Building For Parents
6. Summer Opportunities For Your Children

A total of forty-nine (49) parents participated in the community-based workshops. Sometimes as many as twenty-one (21) parents participated and at other times as few as four (4) parents participated. Each workshop was one hour per session. Effective Communication Skill Building For Parents was a ten-session workshop. Nutritious Appetizing Snacks was a three-session workshop. Good Study Skills which included helping your child with reading and math at home was a three-session workshop.

A total of eleven (11) parents attended school based activities. Parents were offered transportation to the following school based activities:

1. Open House
2. PTSA Meetings
3. Sixth Grade Orientation
4. Curriculum Fair

As many as six (6) parents attended these school-based activities and as few at one (1) parent. Around the end of the 1991-92 school year, parents began to call the school to request transportation to school functions; whereas, at the beginning of the school year with trans -portation being available, parents did not acknowledge it or request it.

Overall, during the 1991-92 school year, parent participation was overwhelmingly better than participation during the 1990-91 school year; however more parents participated in more community-based meetings than at the school site. According to the Pre- and post-questionnaires parents benefitted from the information received from the workshops.

One of the main objectives of the program was to help eighty (80) percent of the targeted students score above the 40th percentile on the California Achievement Test (CAT) and to pass all core subjects over a three year period. In comparing the 1991-92 CAT scores with the 1990-91 CAT scores, 53 percent of our target student population scored above the 40th percentile and 47 percent scored below the 40th percentile on the 1991-92 CAT. During the 1990-91 school year, 60 percent of the 80 targeted students scored below the 40th percentile and 40 percent scored above the 40th percentile on the CAT. This is a 13 percent increase over the 1990-91 CAT scores. At this point, it is difficult to determine clearly how many students passed core subjects. If a student fails a subject during the regular school year but passes that subject in summer school, the student passes for the school year. For this report, we cannot make an accurate statement about how many students passed core subjects. We will be able to do this after summer school.

A second objective was to establish a community-based tutorial program for students in grades 6, 7 and 8. Tutoring was offered twice a week from January through May, 1992. Twelve to fifteen students attended regularly. The tutorial program was extremely successful for

our first year operating the IMPAC Program. The twelve to fifteen students came to every session faithfully. Tutors from North Carolina Central University were dependable and very dedicated to the program. The thirteen (13) percent increase in CAT scores for the 1991-92 school year can be partly attributed to the success of the tutorial program. After evaluating the first six (6) months of operating the tutorial program, it seems necessary to improve the communication between teachers and tutors in order to have better coordination of services that will benefit the learning needs of the student. Pre- and post-student questionnaires showed that after students participated in the tutorial program they (1) completed more homework assignments, (2) got the help needed from tutors, (3) enjoyed the experience, and (4) expressed their intent to participate in the tutoring program when school starts in the fall of 1992.

The third objective to publish a monthly newspaper with parents, students and school news was accomplished. A parent volunteered to help coordinate the publication but moved from the community during the school year. The parent was not replaced. The coordinators of the IMPAC Program continued the leadership role to publish the newspaper. The students enjoyed being reporters and helping to publish the newspaper. This is a good project that boosts positive self-esteem.

Objective four to reduce the absenteeism to 25 percent less than last year was not quite met. This year the highest number of days absent was 80, last year it was 51. This was due to one student refusing to attend school because of academic and behavior problems and the parent refusing to cooperate with the school. The child and parent knew that the child would be socially promoted to the next grade without attending school regularly. The average number of days missed this year was 23 and the average number of days missed last year was 27. This was not a 25 percent decrease but a 20 percent decrease in school absenteeism.

The weakest link in the program this year was parent involvement; however, there is a small nucleus of parents to build on for the second year (1992-93). In the Oxford Manor Community, many different programs have started but failed to survive. IMPAC survived! But because of the weak link, more time needs to be invested in coordinating the parent component of the program; therefore, if funding is obtained, it will be necessary to hire a parent/school coordinator for this component alone.

APPENDIX A

TUTORING REFERRAL FORM

Date:_____ Student Name:_____

School:_____ Grade Level:_____

Referred By:_____ Problem Subject:_____

Homeroom Teacher:_____ Parent's Daytime Phone:_____

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX B

I M P A C

PRE-POST PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

		Yes	No
1.	Do you know where Carrington Middle School is located?	___	___
2.	Have you visited Carrington Middle School this school year?	___	___
3.	Do you know your child's counselor?	___	___
4.	Have you talked to your child's counselor this school year?	___	___
5.	Have you attended a PTSA meeting at CMS?	___	___
6.	Are you a member of the Carrington PTSA?	___	___
7.	Do you know the dates of the Carrington PTSA meetings?	___	___
8.	Do you know if your child does his/her homework regularly?	___	___
9.	Does your child have a set time to do homework everyday?	___	
10.	Do you check to see if your child completes homework assignments regularly?	___	___
11.	What time does your child go to bed during the school week? _____		
12.	Has your child missed the school bus this year?	___	___
	How many times? _____		
13.	Does your child need after school tutoring?	___	___
	If so, in what subject? _____		
14.	Is tutoring available in your neighborhood?	___	___
15.	Does your child use the Bragtown or Riverview library?	___	___
16.	Do you know about these programs at Carrington?		
	a. Academic Betterment Class (ABC)	___	___
	b. Peer Tutoring Program	___	___
	c. Vocational Career Counseling	___	___
	d. The Cooler (Time-Out)	___	___
	e. School Social Worker	___	___
	f. School Nurse	___	___

17. At this time, what is your general feeling towards Carrington Middle School?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

PRE-POST STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

		ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER
1. Are you satisfied with your grades?	1.			
2. Do you complete all of your homework every night?	2.			
3. Do you study if you do not have homework?	3.			
4. Do you have someone at home to help you do difficult homework?	4.			
5. Would you attend a tutoring program in your community?	5.			
6. Do you plan to complete high school?	6.			
7. Do you stay out of school when you are not sick?	7.			
8. Do you usually miss more than 10 days of school every year?	8.			
9. Approximately, how many days did you miss school last year. _____days	9.			
10. Do you think going to school is important?	10.			
POST QUESTIONS ONLY				
11. Did you go to the IMPAC Tutoring Program this year?				
12. Did you do better in school because of the help you received at the tutoring program?	12.			
13. Approxiamtely, how many days did you miss school this school year. _____days	13.			

APPENDIX D

EVALUATION OF IMPAC PARENT MEETING/WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

TITLE OF ACTIVITY:

PRESENTER(S):

DATE:

Please check your reaction to the following items:

	ITEMS	EXCELLENT	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	POOR
1.	CONTENT OF SESSION				
2.	MANNER IN WHICH MATERIAL WAS PRESENTED				
	HELPFULNESS OF SESSION TO YOU				
4	RECEIVED ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS				
5.	RELATIONSHIP OF FACILITATORS TO PARTICIPANTS				
6.	OVERALL IMPRESSION OF SESSION				

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU